**Controversial article in school newspaper becomes 'learning experience'**

**Article about lunch program for students who may not be U.S. citizens caused some students to object**

John Hopperstad Q13 FOX News reporter

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At Auburn Riverside High School on October 13, students in the newspaper class were learning a lot about journalism. They also learned about the consequences of reporting on controversial subjects.

“When I first saw the news article, I thought this is going to be bad,” said Bryan Rivera, a senior and school leader.

Rivera was working to diffuse this situation since the school newspaper came out this week.

In the issue was an article about a lunch program for students who may not be U.S. citizens.

And in that article was a quote from a freshman who said, “They didn't pay to become American citizens, so we shouldn't pay for their lunch."

The quote was also one of the headlines on the front page of the paper, and students noticed.

“I thought it was pretty messed up,” said sophomore Tevin Rawls.

Senior Katie Carson said, “Because it was right on the front, it got attention. It probably would have gotten comments either way, just the fact that they published it at all probably sparked it.”

Initially some students contemplated boycotting lunch or staging protests, because they saw this as another issue of race discrimination at Auburn Riverside.

Two years ago, two white students were barred from the graduation ceremony for hanging bananas over a stairwell where a group of black students were hanging out.

Dave Halford, the school’s principal, said that was an isolated case, and that the school actually created several new programs over the last two years to encourage kids to be more accepting of others.

As for the news article, he called it a “learning experience.”

“I can see how it might be made into a racial comment,” said Halford. “But I see it more that it was a political statement.”

Rivera said he moved to Auburn from a school in California where race was a big issue.

He doesn’t see that at Auburn Riverside.

“After we sat down and talked, we realized this was an error and we're going to be worse people for acting upon this,” said Rivera.

“We need to learn how to be understanding and we need to learn how to accept everyone's opinion.”

**Nebraska high school newspaper stirs controversy with articles on racist language**  
**School principal was put on leave after issue published, later reinstated**

*By Erica Hudock, SPLC staff writer*  
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**NEBRASKA** -- A high school principal was reinstated after being placed on administrative leave following the distribution of a student newspaper that included articles on racist language.

The Benson High School student newspaper, *The Benson Gazette*, devoted four pages of its April 10 issue to the discussion of race through news articles, editorials and cartoons, some of which reference the word "nigger." One article analyzed the "N-word" by defining it as a derogatory term when ending in "er," but becomes a friendly name when ending in "a."

To warn readers, the newspaper included a disclaimer of its mature content. The newspaper was also taken to Principal Lisa Dale to gain approval of the "questionable content," a requirement of the school district policy, according to the *Omaha World-Herald*.

On April 13, Dale was placed on administrative leave, but was reinstated Monday by Omaha Public Schools. The district received phone calls from school administrators, teachers, parents and students complaining about the content of the articles as early as April 11, according to district spokesperson Luanne Nelson. Nelson could not confirm that the disciplinary action against Dale was connected to the content of the student newspaper.

The newspaper's online publication was removed from the school's Web site April 13 where the district placed an announcement concerning a district investigation: "Omaha Public Schools has never condoned and cannot support the actions which recently resulted in the inappropriate articles published in the Benson High Gazette." The statement also said "unacceptable decision-making by staff has violated the standards set forth by the [district]."

Following that announcement, Dale was put on paid leave, according to Nelson. She said the district is still investigating the situation. According to the *World-Herald*, Dale was contacted by the school district Sunday and was told "she could better serve the school and community by returning to her post." Dale did not return a call for comment.

"What we hope is that the lesson learned is that a high school newspaper is not produced in a bubble," Nelson said. "That a high school newspaper goes to the community...and a dialogue probably needs to occur with more than just a journalism staff, regarding some controversial issues."

Nebraska High School Press Association Executive Director John Bender said discussion of the topic is necessary, considering the school's racial diversity and the fact that these terms are widely used "in music and in the streets." For the 2006-2007 academic year, about 46 percent of the school population is black, about 41 percent is white, about 10 percent is Latino and Asian-Americans and American Indians make up less than 2 percent each, according to the school district.

"I think it will help white students understand why African-American students are so offended when they use it," Bender said, "and I think it will help African-American students understand why it may be inappropriate for them to use it about other African-American students. This is obvious part of their culture. If it's not the student newspaper, then where will it take place?"

Bender also said that the way in which the subject was discussed was appropriate because the newspaper was not using the "n-word" to describe any one person.

"This is the kind of thing that students need to talk about to understand what these words mean and what kinds of emotional impact they can have on the people who are using them," Bender said. "Part of the process of getting an education is learning things for yourself."